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January 11, 2005

Mrs. Kathleen N. Straus, President
State Board of Education
608 W. Allegan
P.O. Box 30008
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear President Straus,

On behalf of the superintendents in Tri-County Alliance for Public Education, I thank you for elevating the dialogue surrounding the school funding crisis developing in our state. By asking Superintendent Tom Watkins to write a call for dialogue, input and action, together you have endorsed the fact that there are indeed structural issues underlying this crisis which must be addressed now.

We believe that the gravity of this funding crisis requires dialogue and action among all constituencies with an investment in the continued effectiveness of Michigan's public education system. We find it difficult to imagine a population this does *not* include. In other words, anyone invested in Michigan's future needs to be concerned about the quality of our state's K-12 education system today. At a time when our state economy suffers during a tediously slow economic recovery, we cannot afford to jeopardize the educational foundation of the very students whom we want to lead Michigan's economy tomorrow. We sincerely hope that Superintendent Watkins' paper will spur a more rapid pace in the work which is needed to forge solutions.

We appreciate Superintendent Watkins' support for an Adequacy and Equity Study to define the cost of educating a child in Michigan in 2005. This is a concept which was surfaced by the Tri-County Alliance last spring, and we continue to believe it is one of the blocks in the foundation of a revised, long-term funding solution. As his paper outlines, more than half the states in our country have undertaken, or are currently engaged in, this type of inquiry; and, in case after case, states have recognized the need to correct an inadequate or inequitable funding structure. We must not delay in undertaking this study. We must be certain that it is designed and conducted by those well-equipped to grasp the financial realities of the educational process. And, we must garner the courage to respond appropriately to the study's results.

Similarly, the Tri-County Alliance supports continued efforts, both locally and statewide, to create operational efficiencies that stretch the education dollar. Many of our districts already have joint operating agreements among districts, or with local governments, that allow districts to contain certain costs while enhancing educational program. We embrace our responsibility to be stewards of our districts' resources and continue to seek out these opportunities.

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Further, through our strategic plan begun in 2003-04, our Alliance has committed to supporting major cost efficiencies for districts such as statewide health insurance for school employees and consolidated energy purchase programs. This year we have added to our strategic plan our commitment to support revisions in the Michigan Public School Employees Retirement System that reduce costs to districts while addressing fairly the needs of retirees.

We thank Superintendent Watkins and the State Board of Education for articulating the importance of several of these initiatives. We stand ready to contribute to the work needed to accomplish these objectives. At the same time, I must acknowledge the obvious that none of these issues is easy. We believe that our State Superintendent and Board are well aware of that and recognize that the richness of dialogue, perhaps *especially* where we will disagree, can strengthen the quality of the results.

Thank you for launching the dialogue. Let the action begin.

Sincerely,



E. Kathleen Booher, Ed.D.

Executive Director

cc John C. Austin
 Elizabeth W. Bauer
 Carolyn L. Curtin
 Nancy Danhof
 Marianne Yared McGuire
 Reginald M. Turner
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 Tom Watkins